

Steed: 'I am not resigning'

GOP chairman takes more flack over gun violence letter

By Brandon Macz/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

With blood running down his face, Latah County GOP Chairman Walter Steed had a clear message for his fellow Republicans on Tuesday night - "I am not resigning."

Twelve Latah County Republican precinct committeemen last month passed a vote of no confidence in Steed after he signed a letter to the Legislature as president of the Moscow City Council recommending ways of curbing gun violence should it take up the issue this session. Those rallying for his resignation say he didn't uphold the party's values in the Second Amendment.

Steed didn't even get a chance to call for a prayer and recitation of The Pledge of Allegiance before Precinctman David Klingenberg called for a point of order.

"Do we even have a chairman?" he asked. "We took a vote."

Steed fired back that Klingenberg was out of order, apologizing to the assembly because he was dealing with minor surgery on his face and high blood pressure was causing him to bleed.

"That's right, laugh about it," he told Klingenberg. "Laugh about it, you son-of-a-bitch."

"I'm not the one who pissed on the Constitution," Klingenberg said.

Those still supportive of Steed's leadership demanded Klingenberg stop talking. Gresham Bouma, a two-time state Senate candidate, who made the motion for a vote of no confidence last month, did not speak up against Steed. The chairman later read a prepared statement before excusing himself from the meeting as he could not continue the agenda in his current condition.

"I have never asked to be chairman of the Latah County GOP," he said. "Both times, I was asked. I accepted the position with a goal of working toward finding and helping electable conservative candidates; believing our county would be better off following fiscally conservative values."

He did not take credit, but said while chairman there is now a Republican majority on the Latah County Commission, as well as most county elected positions.

"Latah County is rather closely divided between Republicans and Democrats," Steed said. "We are the second-most liberal county in the state. I believe candidates who espouse extreme views in either party are not going to be elected."

He said many have asked him not to resign, and are worried a new structure of leadership could turn off Republicans seeking viable conservative candidates and also keep them away from election polls when the time comes.

"Latah County will then stand a good chance of becoming totally governed by the Democrats," Steed said. "I am sure to the chagrin of some of you, I am not resigning. To follow the wishes of 12 of 27 elected precinct chairs would not move this organization forward or toward cohesiveness, but would only fracture it further than it has already been torn."

GOP Vice Chairman Thomas Lawford later spoke about a gun rights subcommittee formed last month in response to questions about whether the party was going soft on the issue. A draft letter to Idaho Senate Majority Leader Bart Davis, who serves on the Judiciary and Rules Committee, and written by the subcommittee was approved Tuesday. It quotes the Second Amendment and Idaho Constitution's language regarding the right to bear arms and encourages lawmakers to enforce gun laws already in effect, but states no further rules or regulations are needed.

"We're against adding more regulations and limits, so we decided, let's just write that," Lawford said, adding proposed gun control measures only appear to affect law-abiding citizens. "Somehow, I think the lawbreakers will still disobey the law."

A bylaws subcommittee has also been formed as the county chapter is no longer in compliance with the state party in terms of how it handles reorganization and elections due to the inclusion of caucuses. Streamlining and reducing the bureaucracy to allow the local party to respond more quickly to issues also needs to be handled, Lawford said, adding revisions are expected to occur before the end of summer.

"How we replace officials has been brought up," he said, "and we'll discuss that. ... We have to think long-term, and we have to be fair."

He said there is also concern for what constitutes a quorum - just five members - and how a small fraction of dissidents could vote to change leadership and bylaws should many be away on other business.

Before the end of the meeting, Klingenberg apologized for his outburst and Steve Piper apologized to Secretary Mary Steed for being overly confrontational with her during last month's meeting. He added he still would have liked for the chairman to have stayed and answered questions.

Roger Falen asked fellow Republicans to work together to resolve divisiveness within the party and to accept differences of opinion to ensure the GOP remains in the majority in the county.

"Otherwise, the liberal, big-spending Democrats are going to win," he said.

Brandon Macz can be reached at (208) 882-5561, ext. 238, or by email to bmacz@dnews.com.